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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**STRIKING THE BALANCE BETWEEN TRAINING HIGH-INTENSITY  
CONFLICT AND COUNTRINSURGENCY:  
MAINTAINING FULL SPECTRUM DOMINANCE IN THE US ARMY**


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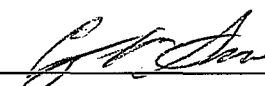
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## **Executive Summary**

**Title:** Striking the Balance between Training High Intensity Conflict and Counterinsurgency: Maintaining Full Spectrum Dominance in the US Army

**Author:** Major Warren Sponsler, United States Army

**Thesis:** The US Army's operational tempo, given current resources in fighting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, is creating a generation of leaders untrained to meet the potential full spectrum threats that we must be prepared to confront on the battlefield of tomorrow.

**Discussion:** The United States Army has been fighting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001 with great success, especially given the challenges of the contemporary operating environment our junior leaders face every day. This success, however, has come with a cost. While soldiers, leaders, and units have adapted over the past six-plus years to fight an adaptive and innovative counterinsurgency, they have lost many of the full spectrum core-competency warfighting skills that make our Army the most formidable in the world. Although not an immediate concern as the focus rightfully continues to be on fighting and winning the current engagements, undoubtedly the wars of tomorrow will not be the same as the wars of today and the US Army must remain prepared to meet future threats. This paper describes some of those training deficiencies, provides a recent historical example of this issue in the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War, and offers recommendations to address the issue. Given the wide variety of units, missions, and roles within the US Army, this paper will focus on mechanized maneuver battalion and brigade-level organizations.

**Conclusion:** Unless the US Army's leadership begins a mental shift toward a more balanced approach to training, the Army will no longer have the institutional knowledge of how to fight and win to maintain dominance on the conventional battlefield. The basic core high-intensity warfighting skills are absolutely necessary to support US military dominance and promote the achievement of US interests around the world for the future.

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## *Preface*

Over the past several years, the US military has made significant strides toward developing a more cohesive and coherent counterinsurgency doctrine in response to the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. There has, however, been very little attention paid to the status of the US military's core warfighting skills. On the contrary, many military professionals view the necessity for these skills as long past given the rise of powerful non-state actors which have superseded traditional state threats. As military professionals, we must look beyond the conflicts of today in order to address the directions we are headed in the years to come in order to maintain our national security and defense posture. This paper is a humble attempt at maintaining a forward focus to set conditions for future success.

In preparing this paper, I would like to acknowledge the spirited conversations I've had with professional colleagues around the US Army and Marine Corps in completing this study. Understandably, looking to the future can be an emotional and contentious issue as failure to do so adequately can have potentially grave consequences in blood in treasure. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance provided by Dr. Charles D. McKenna, Dean of Academics, USMC Command and Staff College, in preparing this paper.

The Army exists to serve the American people, protect enduring national interests, and fulfill the Nation's military responsibilities. Specifically, the Army mission is to provide to combatant commanders the forces and capabilities necessary to execute the National Security, National Defense, and National Military Strategies. Army forces provide the capability-by threat, force, or occupation-to promptly gain, sustain, and exploit comprehensive control over land, resources, and people.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The United States Army has been fighting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001 with great success, especially given the challenges of the contemporary operating environment our junior leaders face every day. This success, however, has come with a cost. While soldiers, leaders, and units have adapted over the past six-plus years to fight an adaptive and innovative counterinsurgency, they have lost many of the full spectrum warfighting skills that make our Army the most formidable in the world. Although not an immediate concern as the focus rightfully continues to be on fighting and winning the current engagements, undoubtedly the wars of tomorrow will not be the same as the wars of today. The US Army of the future will continue to face new challenges around the globe in support of vital national interests and national security. If the Army continues on the current path, it may find itself unprepared to meet these challenges. The US Army's operational tempo (OPTEMPO), given current resources in fighting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, is creating a generation of leaders untrained to meet the potential full spectrum threats that we must be prepared to confront on the battlefield of tomorrow. This paper describes some of those training deficiencies, provides a recent historical example of where this path potentially leads and offers recommendations to address the issue. Given the wide variety of units, missions, and roles within the US Army, this paper will focus on mechanized maneuver battalion and brigade-level organizations.

## Background

The modern operational Brigade Combat Team (BCT) and subordinate battalions are understandably focused on one thing: fighting and winning on their next deployments. Most recently, these deployments have become more frequent, leading to less than twelve months of dwell time between having troops in the combat zone. This rapid turn around has forced unit leaders and commanders to make tough decisions on what tasks they will train their units to accomplish. Understandably, anything that the soldiers are not expected to encounter during their deployment becomes a lower priority and less time is allocated to it. In many cases, this means commanders devote very little time to what were once considered high-intensity conflict (HIC), kinetic core competencies that were essential to a particular military occupational specialty or unit type. A core competency is defined as those tasks or skills that a unit must perform to maintain warfighting capability. MG Robert M. Williams, then Chief of Armor and Commanding General at Ft. Knox stated, "While I fully understand the requirements for training the Armor Branch to fight the current enemy, we cannot forget that we must always be prepared to engage and destroy the enemy in offensive and defensive operations across the spectrum, as well as conduct stability and reconstruction operations."<sup>2</sup> Additionally, with the severe limitations in time at home station between deployments, units have a tendency not to train on tasks they do not expect to encounter on the next deployment in lieu of providing soldiers more time at home before heading back to combat.

The US Army has an obligation to maintain the capability to fight across the breadth of military operations. In the Army's FM-1, *The Army*, the authors explain the requirement for the Army to be prepared to fight across the full spectrum of conflict. This includes traditional, irregular, catastrophic, and disruptive threats and a combination of these threats employed



simultaneously. Furthermore, "the ability to prevail in major combat operations is a crucial responsibility and primary driver of capabilities development. Many capabilities required for major combat operations apply across the range of military operations," with a focus on, "strategic and operational mobility; advanced information systems to support command, control, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; precision weaponry; force protection; and sustainment."<sup>3</sup>

Army doctrine recognizes the importance of maintaining the edge in high-intensity, lethal combat. In the introduction of the 2008 US Army operations manual, FM 3-0, *Operations*, it states, "Despite the vital importance of nonlethal action to change the civil situation, FM 3-0 recognizes that the Army's primary purpose is deterrence, and should deterrence fail, decisively winning the Nation's wars by fighting as part of an interdependent joint team."<sup>4</sup>

Understanding and properly executing reconstruction, stability and civil support operations such as those currently conducted by units in Iraq and Afghanistan remains absolutely vital to our national interests. Despite this requirement, it is crucial that our basic fighting formations maintain their core capability - to close with and destroy the enemy. Loss of this capability represents a threat to our national security and that of our allies and diminishes the ability of the Nation's leaders to achieve national goals and interests.<sup>5</sup> FM 3-0 recognizes the dangers of focusing on only one portion of the combat spectrum.

Forces involved in protracted stability or civil support operations require intensive training to regain proficiency in offensive or defensive tasks before engaging in large-scale combat operations. Effective training reflects a balance among the elements of full spectrum operations that produces and sustains proficiency in all of them.<sup>6</sup>

Finding this balance does not mean ignoring those tasks, as has been the trend given today's operational tempo. "The Army must be a full-spectrum force capable of fighting in the

counterinsurgency environment, but equally as capable of being dominant on the battlefield in mid- and high-intensity conventional conflicts ... We have never been very good at predicting where, when, or against what enemy or next war will be fought.”<sup>7</sup>

Today’s operating environment requires that the military professional consider all threats of our adversaries for the future – not just those of the here and now. While many experts contend that counterinsurgency will remain the most prevalent and frequent form of warfare the US military will be required to face, there is still an obligation to train across the spectrum. The British Army of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century prior to World War II serves as an example of the trap of a failure to train and equip a conventional and lethal military.

The British had the world’s best “small war” force – an army well-trained and equipped for fighting bandits and guerrillas – but it was ludicrously insufficient to deter German aggression or to defeat Germany once a world war broke out. That mistake, symbolized by deficiencies in tanks and aircraft carriers, hastened the end of the Pax Britannica.<sup>8</sup>

The challenges associated with developing and guiding the military for the future are not new, nor does the United States have a very good track record at predicting how to meet those challenges. “The United States has a tradition of planning for the wrong war.”<sup>9</sup> Prior to World War I, World War II, Korea and Vietnam, the United States made manning, doctrine, organizational, and equipment acquisition decisions for fighting a different type of war that they actually ended up fighting. Due to these miscalculations, the first engagements of those major conflicts were often disastrous with unnecessary loss of blood and treasure.<sup>10</sup>

As a result of the US military’s overwhelming victories in Operation Desert Storm, Operation Enduring Freedom, and the opening stages of Operation Iraqi Freedom, our adversaries understand that they cannot face the conventional might of the US Military. Our current and future adversaries are paying close attention as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

continue to unfold and United States military commitment in the region remains high.

Undoubtedly, potential adversaries have also observed the shift in focus the US Army has made in recent years toward a more counterinsurgency proficient force and the corresponding decline in lethal capability. For both state and non-state actors that pose potential threats to United States interests, this may pose the opportunity to challenge US dominance on the conventional battlefield. Potential nation-state challenges still exist around the world today. Potential peer competitors such as Russia and China still possess and continue to build robust traditional military capability.<sup>11</sup> A conflict over Taiwan, Ukraine, or the Baltic States could quickly escalate into a limited high-intensity conflict which would require those skills that are currently eroding in US Army combat units.

The US Army cannot afford the consequences of losing proficiency in conducting offensive and defensive operations on the high-intensity, conventional, lethal battlefield. While we can fully anticipate that fourth generational warfare, counterinsurgency, nation building, and stability operations, will remain the most likely operations our military will be required to conduct, they are not the most dangerous types of operations. "In watching the behavior of potential peer competitors like Russia and China, we see the world returning to a more traditional model ... Non-state actors are painful. But they do not threaten the survival of the Republic. Nation-states do."<sup>12</sup> Not only does the proficiency of a traditional military allow for quick victories such as during Operation Desert Storm, but high-intensity conflict proficiency also serves as a deterrent to others who might challenge the US Army on the battlefield. Maintenance of this sort of proficiency also lends to legitimacy in supporting foreign internal defense and security cooperation missions with coalition partners around the world. These operations, while short of combat, serve the national interests in developing global defense partnerships.

Today, the enemy is forced to develop new strategies and concepts to counter the United States' conventional military might. If units, however, continue to ignore the basic warfighting core competencies and experience base that have made the US Army so effective in the past, the result will be a full generation of leaders who must relearn and retrain those basic skills. The cost of this retraining could be paid with the lives of tomorrow's soldiers, as they will be unprepared to respond to the requirements of the future battlefield.

Air Force General Lance Smith, who recently left the post as the commander of U.S. Joint Forces Command, expressed this growing concern among the military's top leadership. "The danger now, of course, is that we get so focused on counterinsurgency and irregular warfare that we are not prepared for a different kind of war – whether that's major conventional war, or what I think is the likely future... a hybrid of large conventional war and irregular warfare."<sup>13</sup> Focusing on only one type of warfare for an extended period creates a generational gap in the technical and tactical proficiency that could take yet another generation to regain. On today's ever-lethal battlefield, we cannot afford the hard lessons of defeat in relearning those critical skills.

The US military – in particular the US Army and Marine Corps – have devoted significant resources toward becoming more effective in the operating environments of Iraq and Afghanistan. These efforts have led to the creation of multiple research and doctrine development forums, not to mention the publication of the Army-Marine Corps FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*. This expansion of doctrine has bridged a much-needed gap within Army capabilities in fighting and defeating insurgencies although more work still needs to be done. Out of necessity, units now devote significant time training relevant tasks such as processing detainees, negotiation skills, governance issues, and economic development. While still

important, these skills have only marginal value on the high intensity battlefield, and the emphasis of focusing on counterinsurgency has come at a cost.

Unfortunately, the U.S. military tends to operate on the principle that whatever's worth doing is worth overdoing. Today's Army and Marine Corps are so consumed by counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and Iraq that the bread-and-butter skills that underwrite the two services' ability to conduct effective combined arms operations are at serious risk of atrophying.<sup>14</sup>

### Core Competencies of Concern

Some of the core competencies that units are not training include maneuver, gunnery, and combined arms synchronization and planning at the battalion and BCT level. While this list is not all-inclusive, it does provide an example of some of the skills that are deteriorating. Although there may not be an immediate requirement for these skills on the lower end of the combat spectrum as units conduct operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the longer they are neglected, the more difficult it will be to regain proficiency.

#### Maneuver

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are squad-, platoon-, and sometimes company-level fights and our leaders at those levels have developed proficiency beyond their predecessors in the ability to think critically and meet the challenges of the counterinsurgency environment. The counterinsurgency environment forces junior leaders to assess situations rapidly, process information thoroughly, and make well thought out decisions in order to prepare for a wide range of threats. While counterinsurgency skills have increased, units have not had the opportunity to train on many basic platoon, company, and higher level core offensive and defensive tasks. For example, few armor platoon leaders have planned, prepared, and executed a deliberate defense. Many of the skills associated with conducting a deliberate platoon or company level defense

have already atrophied to the point that significant retraining will be necessary to regain competence. Only the field grade officers and senior non-commissioned officers within a given organization have trained or experienced these type operations.<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, few reconnaissance squadrons are actually practicing and developing critical reconnaissance skills. Today, one third of the ground maneuver capability of the transformed BCT in Infantry Brigade Combat Teams and Heavy Brigade Combat Teams and a quarter in the Stryker Brigade Combat Team is provided by the reconnaissance squadron – a significant investment of resources and manpower. Most of these squadrons, however, are not conducting a reconnaissance mission and are instead given battlespace within the BCT's area of operations – as required by the demands of fighting the enemy and maintaining stability. Reconnaissance squadrons then spend the majority of time executing the same tasks and missions as their combined arms and infantry battalion sister units. The result is that although reconnaissance squads and platoons are becoming very adept at site security, patrolling, and raids, they are losing the ability to carry out the basic tasks for which they were designed: reconnaissance and conduct security missions for the brigade combat team.

Even as some units attempt to make up lost ground and complete fundamental tasks, many basic skills may already be lost. One reconnaissance squadron commander who did conduct some platoon level HIC training stated, “based on my observations of six scout platoons going through situational training exercise lanes that tested their core competencies, I can confirm that our core competencies are severely degraded and that if we had to fight in a major theater of war (conventional) today, we would go into the conflict at a much lower training level than before 2004.”<sup>16</sup> While not an immediate concern in the counterinsurgency environment, key skills such as properly using terrain, concealed movement, and basic assembly area

operations have severely degraded to the point that units are no longer capable of completing them adequately or in accordance with minimum standards without major retraining – something units don't have the time to do with the current deployment pace.

An example of how the training effort has shifted in the US Army is the training focus at the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, CA. The NTC has been the Army's premier maneuver training center for over 25 years, providing units with challenging missions, an adaptive opposing force, professional evaluations, and a challenging environment. As a matter of necessity, the NTC today is focused almost entirely on preparing units to fight and win in Iraq and Afghanistan. Units no longer train for traditional warfighting tasks and instead conduct Mission Rehearsal Exercises (MRE) in preparation for specific deployments. The NTC then replicates the environment and mission sets that units will most likely experience in their particular theater or area of operations within that particular theater. The MRE then serves as a graduation or validation exercise to prepare a unit for deployment. Instead of evaluating units based on core mission essential tasks (METL) units are instead evaluated on how well they perform those tasks they will most likely encounter, such as reaction to sniper fire, negotiations, and cultural understanding.<sup>17</sup> While this undoubtedly serves the purpose of preparing units to fight and win in Iraq, it does not support training and proficiency on core warfighting capabilities in preparation for tomorrow's war.

### Gunnery

Gunnery skills, specifically those in mechanized and armor units, have atrophied significantly the past several years. "Units are proficient with machine gun engagements; however, main gun engagement skills have been significantly degraded."<sup>18</sup> Similar to high-intensity maneuver skills, precision long-range gunnery skills are generally not required in Iraq

or Afghanistan and are, therefore, given a lower priority for training prior to deployment. Very rarely, if ever, will an armor or mechanized infantry platoon leader be required to plan and execute a platoon fire plan and, therefore it is not being trained. "In a recent survey of career course captains, who were assigned to Armor battalions, a significant number of officers reported they had never fired a full-up gunnery."<sup>19</sup> The technical skills associated with employing the main weapon systems of an M1A2 Abrams tank on the battlefield are being lost. In some cases today, armor company commanders with six or more years of time in service will have never conducted a full gunnery exercise. Despite this lack of experience, these same officers may be required during their next operational assignment to train and employ a fully equipped combined arms battalion in a high intensity, kinetic conflict while serving as a unit operations officer.

#### Combined Arms Synchronization

Units are rarely, if ever, training, practicing, or executing the synchronization of combined arms operations given the intricacies of the contemporary operating environment in Iraq and Afghanistan. As previously stated, the fight in Iraq is a squad, platoon and sometimes company fight. At these levels, battalion and brigade staffs are not required to conduct the planning, preparation, and coordination to support a fully combined arms operation. One BCT-level staff officer recently preparing to deploy to Iraq explained that units no longer conduct the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP) at the battalion or brigade level instead executing a modified targeting process for a prepared mission type.<sup>20</sup> The result is that staffs are no longer training on basic command and control functions. "We stress the MDMP at the Leader Training Program (LTP) for the overall campaign plan, but for the rotation we move into a five day targeting meeting cycle. Once the intelligence for an out-of-sector mission HIC is pushed down



to the battalion, they have a difficult time transitioning from targeting to MDMP.”<sup>21</sup> Because of this deficiency, units are unable to execute missions outside of the commonly used abbreviated targeting process. One trainer at the National Training Center explained that when given out-of-sector missions beyond their counterinsurgency areas of operations, units are unable to plan or adequately execute the tasks necessary to accomplish such missions and instead are forced to fight through the process with great difficulty.<sup>22</sup> Units resist conducting training on the MDMP as they do not expect to be required to execute it in theater and instead focus their energies on developing an efficient and effective targeting process.<sup>23</sup> While the requirement for deliberate, detailed planning may not exist in the current dispersed operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, Army leaders still must understand this process as they may be called to execute it in the future.

#### Sustainment and Support

Many sustainment and support proficiencies are also being lost because of the fixation on the counterinsurgency environments of Iraq and Afghanistan. Forward Operating Base (FOB) logistics are not training our BCT and battalion level sustainment functions. Iraq is now a developed theater with many logistical functions now being performed by contractors and local nationals. Units no longer have the requirement to execute tactical sustainment logistics. Logisticians are, therefore, unprepared to meet the dynamic demands of tactical sustainment functions as they only conduct steady state sustainment. Tactical logistics supporting conventional defensive and offensive operations has become a “lost art.”<sup>24</sup> As with gunnery and maneuver, sustainment troops and units within the BCT are unfamiliar and unprepared to meet the demands of supporting kinetic conventional offensive or defensive operations at the battalion level.

Another casualty of the increased operations cycle affecting our units is the loss of many essential garrison-type tasks. One of these tasks is training management and the ability of a unit leader to assess his unit in order to develop a comprehensive training plan that addresses identified training deficiencies. With the increasingly large number of pre-deployment tasks that units are required to accomplish prior to entering the current combat zones, they have little or no opportunity to deviate beyond what is specified by higher headquarters. Platoon leaders and company commanders execute the training plans handed to them and do not assess, plan, resource, or execute deficient tasks beyond these lists.<sup>25</sup> While this deficiency is not an immediate concern to meet the requirements of the next deployment, an officer or non-commissioned officer who advances within the organization could find that he is unprepared for future demands when a dictated training plan is no longer provided in a developed, routine format.

#### Historical Example: The 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War

The summer 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War in southern Lebanon provides one example of the disastrous effects of focusing purely on counterinsurgency and stability instead of training for the full spectrum of combat operations. This war represented the type of asymmetric, full spectrum conflict that the United States may face in the future pitting a professional nation-state military against an asymmetric, irregular opponent with many advanced nation-state capabilities. While many other factors contributed to Israel's strategic defeat, the degradation of basic warfighting capabilities prevented the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) from achieving the military victory on the battlefield.

Between 2000 and 2006, the IDF focused almost entirely on policing duties in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. "Subsequent to the outbreak of the Palestinian Intifadah in 2000, the IDF leadership realized that it was ill-prepared for the fighting against Hamas, the Palestine Liberation Front, and other extremist forces that held the hearts and minds of much of the populations of Gaza and the West Bank."<sup>26</sup> As a result, the IDF began a massive reorganization effort and sought to create the most capable paramilitary police force in the world, building proficiency in corresponding tasks accordingly. The IDF became extremely proficient at small-scale cordon and search, raids and corresponding intelligence tasks.<sup>27</sup> The IDF transformed itself into a highly effective and highly efficient counter-terrorist organization focused on occupation duties. The IDF believed this was the type of threat they must maintain the highest proficiency to defeat.

"This proficiency, however, came with a price. For a number of seemingly valid reasons, many armored units were unable to maintain their proficiency in tank gunnery and combined arms maneuver."<sup>28</sup> Resources normally allocated toward training the traditional, high-intensity warfighting tasks that had overwhelmed Arab armies in previous wars were largely ignored and the capabilities of mechanized combined arms teams were greatly degraded. By the outbreak of hostilities in the summer of 2006, most active mechanized combat arms units had conducted no tactical maneuver training in over a year, and most similar reserve units had not conducted this type of training in over six years.<sup>29</sup> Those six years represented a full generation of leaders within the IDF who had little or no exposure to the complex coordination and tactical employment tasks of mechanized forces. Even at the crew and individual level, basic familiarity with core warfighting tasks had been eliminated by the focus on counterinsurgency. Tank and mechanized crewmen were trained almost exclusively in small unit infantry tasks to support

policing duties in the occupied territories. As a result of the training shift, "Israeli armor troops had to quickly relearn conventional, collective, and individual combat procedures," in the days prior to the July 2006 incursion into Lebanon.<sup>30</sup> Understandably, the IDF was completely unprepared to engage in the mid- to high-intensity level combat that Hezbollah had expected to fight.

Hezbollah was not the traditional guerilla type force that the IDF had been preparing to face. Instead, they were well trained, led, and organized, fully maintaining mid-intensity capabilities. Hezbollah chose the battlefield on which they would face the IDF and prepared an intricate full spectrum defense complete with well-prepared infantry strong points, anti-tank ambushes and coordinated indirect fire. While observing IDF forces in occupation duties and learning from engagements prior to 2000, Hezbollah developed a doctrine that combined characteristics of regular and guerilla forces.<sup>31</sup> "In the words of Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, '...It [Hezbollah] was not a regular army but was not a guerrilla in the traditional sense either. It was something in between.' 'This,' he said, 'is the new model.'"<sup>32</sup> While certainly not a legacy conventionally trained and equipped force, Hezbollah maintained and executed capabilities well beyond those of irregular and disorganized guerillas. During the war, Hezbollah commanders recognized the link between the IDF's most recent experience and their lack of preparedness for the modern battlefield. One observer from Lebanon noted, "Hezbollah commanders found that Israeli troops were poorly organized and disciplined ... The IDF was 'a motley assortment.' But that's what happens when you have spent four decades firing rubber bullets at women and children in the West Bank and Gaza."<sup>33</sup> While this comment may be colored by political bias, it does demonstrate the view of the potential effects of extended stability and civil support operations can have on a professional army.

When the IDF's armored spearhead entered Lebanon, they found that they were unable to coordinate armor, infantry, and artillery against strongly held enemy positions. Leaders within the IDF were unfamiliar and untrained to deploy their units and mitigate the risks of advanced anti-tank weaponry due in large part to their lack of training and familiarity with high-intensity tactics. For example, instead of utilizing available assets to avoid strong points, maneuver units entered likely ambush sites to disastrous consequences. Even brigade-level commanders made extremely poor tactical decisions resulting in numerous losses of men and equipment.<sup>34</sup> The once vaunted armored backbone of the IDF was left defeated and demoralized on an unfamiliar battlefield. This traumatic experience for the IDF was clearly an example of the lack of training in the essential tasks enabling leaders to identify threats and act accordingly to eliminate them. Units relied on the counterinsurgency and counter-terrorist skills that formed the basis of their military experience. These were the tasks that they viewed as most relevant for operations to that point, the tasks they had most often trained and the tasks with which they were most familiar. As a result, they were unable to maximize the full benefit that a modern professional army brings to the battlefield.

Problems with the regular forces appear to be related to the way they were committed, inexperience at the battalion level and below, and improper training for the kind of fighting they were going to face. Especially in the beginning, troops were committed in small numbers in a raiding role. When they encountered greater-than-expected opposition, they suffered casualties, leading to local uncoordinated escalation in the form of rescue efforts, which also became entangled in the fighting and sustained casualties. These small-scale engagements negated Israel's superiority in terms of maneuver, numbers, and firepower and reduced the early fighting to a series of actions in which Hizballah's discipline, weaponry, and preparation of the ground were maximized. Below the battalion level, where much of the burden of the fighting actually falls, the Israelis were inexperienced in Lebanon and with Hizballah.<sup>35</sup>

The military results of the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War were inconclusive and fell well short of Israel's stated political objectives. Israel committed a military that was unprepared to fight the kind of war that it was required to fight. Years of occupation duty and shifts in training emphasis to almost exclusively counterinsurgency tasks had taken their toll. The example of the IDF in Lebanon demonstrates the pitfalls of relying too heavily on the current fight and leaders not taking strategic readiness seriously enough to devote sufficient resources. Due to their lack of training and capability, Hezbollah won a strategic victory, the fruits of which continue today.

### Recommendations

Training the full spectrum of military operations does not necessitate that the US Army abandon the efforts towards successfully meeting the demands of modern counterinsurgency and winning the Long War. Instead, the need is to find the balance between training for the current conflicts and training to be prepared for the contingencies of the future. The debate centers on whether commanders train their units on those tasks relevant to the current fight or focus on core warfighting competencies. The answer lies in a combination of effort, balancing these two requirements. Meeting this balance while continuing to fight the current war requires innovative approaches, some tied to developing a more flexible mindset within the US Army culture.

It is unfeasible and counterproductive to split the force into specific units focused on only one portion of the spectrum of combat operations. All units must maintain full spectrum capability due to resource constraints and the numbers of troops serving. One way to leverage full spectrum abilities while increasing civil support and stability capability is to increase the number of specialized soldiers serving in the active force such as civil affairs, information operations, construction engineer, and similar occupational specialties.<sup>36</sup> Associated with this

increase in capability is a shift in attitude toward these specialties. Instead of just being viewed as marginal supporters of the lethal fight, commanders at all levels need to change their perceptions of the contributions these enablers can make.

One organization that can assist in meeting the deficiency in high-intensity skills is the Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). While TRADOC has the responsibility to adapt to meet the challenges of today, they also have the responsibility to look ahead to tomorrow's conflicts. Despite the resistance of some students, faculty and unit leadership, training in core competencies through professional military education must remain a large part of the curriculum to establish a base of knowledge. If individuals are not receiving the time to train some tasks when serving in high OPTEMPO operational units, then they must be willing to devote this time in the schoolhouse.

Some institutions are responding to this need. For example, in response to declining gunnery experience among armor officers in their operational units as a result of the competing demands of counterinsurgency training, the US Armor School has reinstituted the Tank Commander's Certification Course (TC3) and basic gunnery training at the Maneuver Captain's Career Course (MCCC).<sup>37</sup> MCCC should also continue to stress to infantry and armor junior officers the intricacies of company-team maneuver by emphasizing high-intensity simulation exercises, tactical exercises without troops, decision-making games, and practical applications accordingly. Additionally, other TRADOC institutions should stress similar activities at other branch and specialty schools.

Additionally, because commanders and staffs are not executing the Military Decision Making Process in practice during operational deployments, this must be included and emphasized in the Command and Staff Colleges – to include high-intensity scenarios.

Unfortunately, many Professional Military Education (PME) students will see these exercises and blocks of instruction as meaningless wastes of time as they may not be applied during their next operational assignment. TRADOC still must maintain and enforce training this standard.

Certainly time between deployments to allow a full spectrum train-up would also be greatly beneficial. Initiatives to grow the Army over the next several years will certainly help alleviate the pressure of frequent lengthy deployments, although it will not eliminate it. Once units are put back on the intended three-year Army Forces Generation (ARFORGEN) cycle of one deployment every three years, the capability to broaden the training base will certainly be expanded. Until that time, however, we must continue to look at new and innovative ways to maintain core competencies.

Maintaining training standards also involves changing the mindset of many of the Army's leaders. The importance of maintaining full spectrum capability is an educational process and must be encouraged from the highest levels of Army and unit leadership down to the basic battalion and brigade level fighting formations. Fortunately, the Army's senior leadership understands the requirement to look beyond counterinsurgency. In a February 26, 2008, statement, GEN George Casey, Army Chief of Staff explained, "The cumulative effects of the last six-plus years of war have left our Army out of balance (and) consumed by the current fight and unable to do the things that we know we need to do to properly sustain our all-volunteer force and restore our flexibility for an uncertain future."<sup>38</sup>

Some unit leaders, however, are hesitant to train anything beyond what they will see during their next deployment and commented that it would be a "waste of valuable training time honing core competency skills" they would not use on their next deployment.<sup>39</sup> If unit leaders do not support these initiatives and maintain a positive, proactive tone in developing skills across



the spectrum of conflict, then subordinates will not follow accordingly. Maintaining these skills requires innovative leadership to work within the confines of available resources.

### Conclusions

The combat leaders of today's Army are smart, adaptive critical thinkers able to meet the challenges of the evolving counterinsurgency environment. Junior leaders in the contemporary Army have an unparalleled depth of combat and leadership experience in the low and mid-intensity levels of combat. Unfortunately, this experience has come at a cost, and the core warfighting skills on which the United States Army has maintained dominance in land warfare are eroding.

The issue at stake is really the generational gap that the current focus has caused. Even after the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are over, commanders will have to make a conscious effort to begin retraining traditional conventional core tasks. From within the Army there will be a tendency to continue training those tasks on which units are most comfortable. At that point, those tasks will still be in the realm of counterinsurgency and stability operations. Unless the US Army's leadership begins a mental shift toward a more balanced approach to training, the Army will no longer have the institutional knowledge of how to fight and win to maintain dominance on the conventional battlefield.

In just a few short years, those officers and senior non-commissioned officers who do possess significant experience in high intensity operations will be leaving military service. With them will go the wealth of experience and professional expertise they had attained during their careers. As a result, Army leaders will have to relearn many hard lessons. If the country is again

called to fight a major war before there is adequate opportunity for retraining, those lessons will be learned with the blood of young soldiers.

The skill, experience and growth that Army leaders have developed in assessing the dynamic counterinsurgency battlefield should not be lost. There is little doubt that had Army leaders had a more thorough understanding of the low-intensity battlefield earlier in Operation Iraqi Freedom, our efforts would have unquestionably been much more effective in bringing stability to Iraq. Counterinsurgency, stability operations, and civil support will remain an important part of what the US military must be able to do in the future to support national objectives. This does not mean, however, that the basic, lethal warfighting skills that ensure dominance on the battlefield have no place in the modern US Army. On the contrary, it is these core high-intensity conflict skills that are absolutely necessary to support US military dominance and promote the achievement of US interests around the world for the future.

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Headquarters US Department of the Army, *The Army*, FM 1 (Washington, DC: US Department of the Army, June 14, 2005), para 2-26.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Williams, "Maintaining Armor Core Competencies," *Armor* 116, no. 1 (January-February 2007): 4.

<sup>3</sup> *The Army*, para 4-4.

<sup>4</sup> Headquarters US Department of the Army, *Operations*, FM 3-0 (Washington, DC: US Department of the Army, February 27, 2008), pg viii.

<sup>5</sup> *The Army*, para 4-8.

<sup>6</sup> *Operations*, para 3-10.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald H. Griffith, "The Six Imperatives: Prioritizing for the Future Army," *Armor* 116, no. 3 (September-October 2007): 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> Max Boot, *War Made New: Technology, Warfare, and the Course of History, 1500 to Today* (New York: Gotham, 2006), 472.

<sup>9</sup> George Friedman, "Beyond Fourth Generation Warfare," *The Officer* 83, no. 7 (September 2007): 57.

<sup>10</sup> Friedman, 57-58.

<sup>11</sup> Friedman, 59.

<sup>12</sup> Friedman, 60.

<sup>13</sup> William H. McMichael, "Are the Troops Losing Their Conventional Warfare Skills?" *Defense News* December 3, 2007, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Hart Sinnreich, "This is No Time for Doctrinal Target Fixation," *Army* 57 no. 4 (April 2007): 10.

<sup>15</sup> CPT Bill Coryell, e-mail message to author, December 21, 2007. CPT Coryell has over two years experience as an observer/controller (OC) at the National Training Center and has observing multiple rotations at company/team and battalion level. CPT Coryell also served as a company executive officer in Iraq in 2003 and as a Company Commander in Iraq in 2005-2006.

<sup>16</sup> LTC Johnny Richardson, e-mail discussion with author, January 13, 2008. LTC Richardson took command of 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 13<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, in the summer of 2007 and has been taking his unit through a deliberate training program in preparation for deployment to Iraq in the spring of 2008.

<sup>17</sup> CPT Bill Coryell, e-mail message to author December 21, 2007. NTC observer/controllers primarily evaluate rotational units at platoon level and above daily on the following tasks: negotiations; cultural understanding; language capability; counter IED; counter sniper; EOF/ROE; search, detain & prosecute; tactical questioning; and every soldier a sensor. Previously, units were evaluated on standard preparation procedures and execution of tasks according to Mission Training Plans (MTPs) from the Army Training and Evaluation Program (ARTEP).

<sup>18</sup> Williams, 4.

<sup>19</sup> MG Robert Williams, "Armor Branch Competency Review Executive Summary," memorandum to TRADOC Commander dated September 20, 2006. This summary was based on surveys given to students and cadre at the US Army Armor School, Ft. Knox, KY, and surveys from battalion and brigade level commanders.

<sup>20</sup> MAJ Larry Burris, e-mail message to author, February 21, 2008. MAJ Burris is the Operations Officer (S3) of 1-66 Armor, 1<sup>st</sup> BDE, 4<sup>th</sup> ID, Fort Hood, TX. MAJ Burris's unit has taken his unit through predeployment training in preparation for deployment to Iraq in March 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Coryell

<sup>22</sup> Coryell

<sup>23</sup> Coryell

<sup>24</sup> Coryell

<sup>25</sup> Burris

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Helmer, "Not Quite Counterinsurgency: A Cautionary Tale for U.S. Forces Based on Israel's Operational Change of Direction," *Armor* 116, no. 1 (January-February 2007): 8.

<sup>27</sup> Helmer, 8.

<sup>28</sup> S E Lee, "From My Position..." *Armor* 116, no. 1 (January-February 2007): 1.

<sup>29</sup> Helmer, 9.

<sup>30</sup> David Eshel, "Lebanon 2006: Did Merkava Challenge Its Match?" *Armor* 116, no. 1 (January-February 2007): 14.

<sup>31</sup> Helmer, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Helmer, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, "Preliminary 'Lessons' of the Israeli-Hezbollah War." Center for Strategic and International Studies (11 SEP 2006). <http://csis.org/burke> (accessed February 21, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> Helmer, 11.

<sup>35</sup> David Makovsky and Jeffrey White, *Lessons and Implications of the Israel-Hizballah War: A Preliminary Assessment*. (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2006), 52, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=251> (accessed March 3, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> Peter W. Chiarelli, "Learning From our Modern Wars: The Imperatives of Preparing for a Dangerous Future," *Military Review*; Sep/OCT 2007; 87; 5, pg 7.

<sup>37</sup> Williams, "Maintaining Armor Core Competencies," 4.

<sup>38</sup> GEN George Casey testimony to Congressional leaders, February 28, 2008. <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=49088>.

<sup>39</sup> Richardson

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